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Letter dated 28 August 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I refer to the letter dated 16 July 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/705). That letter transmits the twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities.

On instructions from my Government, allow me to convey the following national comments and reservations concerning some of the contents of the report. I hope that you will engage with those points and take them into consideration. The Syrian Arab Republic writes in its capacity as a concerned State that is at the forefront of efforts to confront terrorism and the threat posed by the two terrorist organizations and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. Indeed, paragraph 1 of the report acknowledges that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has been genuinely combating Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and has been directly successful in weakening and pushing back ISIL with a view to its eradication.

- My Government has examined the contents of the report with interest. It is pleased to note that the reference to the so-called Islamic military coalition against terrorism has been removed, as has the reference to the purported efforts of the Turkish Government aimed at denying ISIL access to the financial system as well as its generation of funds and to disrupt the movement of foreign terrorist fighters and funds through middlemen or facilitators.

You will recall that such statements appeared in the Team's twenty-first report, and that my Government protested against the inclusion of that information, which is mistaken and inconsistent with the facts. The build-up of events of the last few years has shown that the Governments of Turkey and of certain States members of the so-called Islamic coalition, alongside some other Governments, have supported, funded, armed and facilitated the movement and infiltration of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq. They have also provided funds, weapons and assistance to the terrorist organizations ISIL and Al-Qaida in Syria. Those Governments therefore bear direct and indirect responsibility for the emergence and spread of the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. As a result of such practices, thousands of innocent civilians have been killed, infrastructure and public and private property have been destroyed, the resources and economy of the Syrian Arab Republic have sustained extensive damage, and international peace and security have come under attack.

- The Syrian Government objected that those statements contradicted the facts. It did so because of its responsibility as a founding member of the United Nations

and as a State directly concerned by the subject matter of the Team's reports, particularly given that the relevant Security Council resolutions guarantee that the Team's methods and work should be characterized by independence, professionalism and impartiality.

- By the same token, the Syrian Government rejects the baseless claims made in the summary and in paragraphs 10 and 19 of the report, according to which leaders of the Al-Qaida terrorist group in the Islamic Republic of Iran were able to influence disputes among the fighters in Idlib, in the Syrian Arab Republic. My Government objects to the inclusion of such information, which undermines the credibility of a United Nations report that is supposed to be independent, transparent and free from any politicized tendencies or purposes. My Government has identified some overlap between the mistaken claims made in the present report and the statements made by a certain permanent member of the Security Council that has used its position to carry out a shabby political attack on the Islamic Republic of Iran by citing baseless information. The confirmed facts leave no doubt that Al-Qaida was born because a number of well-known Governments and intelligence services exploited *jihadist*, *takfirist* and Wahhabi ideologies to attract thousands of Muslim youths and recruit them into terrorist movements. Everybody knows that the Iranian Government has from the very outset fought against Al-Qaida's beliefs and practices, which are based on spreading death and destruction and sowing the seeds of sectarianism among Muslims.

- The Syrian Government requests that the statements made in the summary and in paragraphs 10 and 19 of the report be deleted, failing which it will be compelled to object to the inclusion of any reference to the Team's twenty-second report in any future draft resolution or United Nations report.

- According to the summary and core text of the report, ISIL, having been defeated militarily in Iraq and most of the Syrian Arab Republic during 2017, rallied in early 2018 owing to a loss of momentum by forces fighting it in the east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Paragraph 1 states as follows: "Nevertheless, ISIL showed greater resilience in the east of the Syrian Arab Republic, and even slightly recovered the initiative. Several Member States attributed this to a reduced contribution by the mainly Kurdish People's Protection Units contingent of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to the campaign in the east in early 2018. As the Syrian Democratic Forces increased its military activity once more, the momentum of the fighting appeared to be turning against ISIL again by June 2018".

My Government emphasizes that the militias of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces and Kurdish People's Protection Units are illegal armed forces that act outside the framework of the Syrian State. Their activities therefore violate the Constitution and the law and endanger the safety and sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic. The armed militias are associated with hostile American occupation forces and with all forces that cooperate with them as part of the so-called international coalition, which was formed outside the framework of international legality and without a resolution of the Security Council. The illegal armed militias operate at the behest of the hostile American forces, alongside which they have worked to facilitate the exit of ISIL terrorists and their families from Raqqah, along with their medium and heavy weapons, following suspicious deals with the leaders of the terrorist organization.

In its account of the activities of the illegal armed militias, the Team refers to a loss of momentum by forces fighting ISIL. Such was in fact part of the allotted role of those and other militias. The aim was to achieve certain political and military goals, particularly to pave the way and provide the means for the terrorist organization to

recover its power and its operational capacity to confront the Syrian Arab Army and its allies. The same is true of the suspicious role of the American base in Tanf, and of what has happened in the Rukban camp with the knowledge and assistance of the American occupying forces, which surround the camp and control its supply lines. The most recent ISIL attack on Suwayda' governorate is a direct, glaring sign that the so-called international coalition and its associated illegal armed militias are not serious about fighting terrorism. Instead, they have used counter-terrorism as a pretext to achieve political and military goals that threaten the sovereignty and independence of Syria. If this perilous situation is not addressed, it will have a direct impact on regional and international peace and security.

- As regards funding for the Nusrah Front (QDe.137), the Syrian Arab Republic disagrees with the Team's assessment in paragraph 22 of the current report. The evidence for the Nusrah Front's true sources of funding remains unclear and indirect. The authors of the report continue to believe that most of the funding is domestic, and they refer to foreign funding only in an implicit and timid manner. My Government remains firmly convinced that the terrorist Nusrah Front is still receiving direct financial support from the Governments of certain States, foremost among which are Qatar and Turkey. It also receives vast sums from charities and cash collections in numerous countries, particularly in the Gulf region. Moreover, hundreds of so-called charitable associations and civil society organizations located in the areas controlled by the Nusrah Front are masquerading as humanitarian organizations while they are in fact affiliated with the group. Those entities receive funds from abroad, especially through donations and other financing that are indulged, facilitated or simply ignored by the Governments of the countries in question.

- My Government notes with interest that the report states, both implicitly and explicitly, that the terrorist Nusrah Front is no less dangerous than the terrorist organization ISIL. That recognition is belated, even though the Syrian Arab Republic has persistently warned the United Nations and its counter-terrorism agencies and committees that the terrorist organization Nusrah Front has the human, financial and military means to survive and continue perpetrating terrorist acts, more so than the terrorist organization ISIL. Once again, my Government invites the Team to focus in the coming period on the genuine threat posed by the presence of the terrorist organization Nusrah Front and on its strategic and ideological ties and connections with various armed terrorist groups in Syria, groups whose decisions and activities it can even direct or control.

- In that connection, my Government invites the Team to attach particular importance to the activities of a specific and dangerous category of foreign terrorist fighters that is still on Syrian soil, namely the Turkestani and Uighur terrorist fighters within the ranks of the terrorist Nusrah Front and other associated armed terrorist organizations, such as the Turkistan Islamic Party. Lastly, the Syrian Government calls on the Team to examine the question of the involvement of the Governments of certain Member States, particularly the Turkish Government, in supporting and facilitating the activities of those foreign terrorist fighters in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative